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* On January 2, 2013, Neal Bland, Anthony Wade, and Keagean Arrington were all charged with capital murder of Joshua Wood. Joshua was among the lucky people who were able to purchase a pair of the highly collectible Air Jordan “Bred” XI for $185 on the morning of December 21, 2012. Those three men had every intention of stealing those shoes from Joshua, but things didn’t go as they planned. The three men took an innocent man’s life over one pair of sneakers. Instead of a robbery charge they ended up with a murder trial. How could a mere pair of sneakers be worth more than a human life?
* Since the 80’s, sneaker collectors have been camping outside of malls for Air Jordan’s all over the country, and ever since then, they have done nothing but grow in popularity and more importantly to some people, value. Several pairs of the original Air Jordan sneaker that released in 1985 are being sold today for thousands of dollars if they are still in good condition. Just a short while ago 1 pair of original Air Jordan 1’s were sold on Ebay for over 4 thousand dollars.

With so many special releases and rare color ways the price of these shoes can grow to numbers that some people could never imagine spending on a pair of shoes. Among many others, the “Doerenbecher” line of sneakers is one of the most popular and collectible. That line comes from a partnership between the Doerenbecher Children’s Hospital Foundation, and Nike. They allow a child receiving treatment at that hospital to design certain parts of a shoe. All the proceeds generated from the shoe are then donated back to the hospital. The demand and the desire for Air Jordan’s is incredible.

Many collectors rely on these crazy release nights. Just few days after a release the price can go up a hundred dollars, and very few collectors are willing to shell out the added cost. Which then leads them to get the shoe by any other means. What makes people go so crazy over Air Jordans?

There is one factor about Air Jordan sneakers that drives them miles ahead from other sneaker companies; Michael Jordan. Considering that he is arguably the best basketball player to ever step foot onto an NBA court, people literally want to be “Like Mike”. Every pair tells a significant story of Michael’s career. Michael won his first NBA Championship rocking the VI’s, and he won his last wearing the XII’s. The X’s features several of his achievements written on the outsole, such as his 1985 “Rookie of the Year” award, and winning the 1985 Dunk Competition. Hell, they even made a move about his shoes back in 2002; Like Mike. About a young orphan boy who received an old beat up pair of sneakers with the initials M.J on the inside. While wearing the sneakers he was given a un-child like talent at basketball. He had a jump shot that never missed and the jumping ability to dunk on a full sized net, and in result a young boy ends up playing in the NBA. This movie made people feel like the shoes will quite literally make you “Like Mike”.

In reality the shoes do not make you run any faster, jump any higher or even make you a better basketball player in general. That doesn’t matter to people; all that does matter, is that Michael Jordan wore them and in result, everyone had to have them. His fan base was so massive, so many people, young basketball fans especially, looked up to him as a role model. Every sneaker he wore, the public had to wear.

An article from by the *NY Daily News* says that the sneakers marked a new relationship to shoes and basketball between young kids, and especially inner-city black kids. A police officer of 30 years can recall a large spike in the crimes involving sneakers, but at the same time it was no higher than the crime rates for all sports apparel. They say that basketball shoes have never been the problem. “They’ve just been the symptom of a bigger disease: of too many youth, specifically black youth lacking self-esteem, who try to fill this void by getting a hold of something expensive”.

In 1990 Sports Illustrated ran a cover article called “Your Sneakers or Your Life”. It accounts for many sneaker/memorabilia related murders, and notably it’s not always Jordans. From a ninth-grader who was strangled to death by a basketball teammate for his 2 week old Air Jordans, an eighth-grader who was shot in the hallway of his middle school for of his Georgetown jacket, an 18 year old was shot and killed over his $40 sweatpants, and then many more.

In that article, Sports Illustrated held an interview with Michael Jordan. Michael stated, “I thought I’d be helping out others and everything would be positive, I thought that people would try to emulate the good things I do, and that they’d try to achieve to be better. Nothing bad. I never thought because of my endorsement of a shoe, or any product, that people would harm each other. Everyone likes to be admired, but when it comes to kids actually killing each other”-he pauses- “then you have to reevaluate things.”

Studies are suggesting that it is a culture to these kids. Young kids are growing up being taught to be materialistic. With celebrities and famous sports players, wearing all of the expensive name brands, it only leaves kids envious. They want to be like whoever is wearing the name brand. Everyone is judged by who wears what.

Michael Jordan isn’t the problem, and in fact his sneakers aren’t the problem either. The one and only thing that will make people act to these extremes over his sneakers, is plain and simply the money. If there was no value in the shoes and there was no money to be made, there would be no robberies and murders over them, and the Jordan Brand does not stand-alone. Every single name brand company has to deal with their products being linked with thefts and violence. There will always be a demand for their product, but particularly a demand from people who can’t afford to buy it.

People really want the best that there is of anything. From the North Face jackets, to the Gucci belts, to the True Religion jeans, and almost anything that costs more than the average generic brand do. With Air Jordans being able to produce price tags into the thousands, people will do anything to get them. From huge fights breaking out in the middle of a mall, to robberies, and in the most extreme case, murder. People actually want the shoe, THAT badly that they are willing to take a person’s life over them.

* The Jordan Brand has almost no control of the way people act once the shoes are released. Once the shoes are shipped off to the distributers like Foot Locker and Finish Line, they are completely out of the hands of the Jordan Brand. However, the distributers are coming up with ways to create different ways of releasing the shoe, to make sneaker collectors a little safer during the releases.

Just recently Foot Locker tried a method of release for the Air Jordan III “Retro 88”. In 1988 the first Air Jordan III featured Nike Air branding on the heel. After several years they changed the heel to the Air Jordan logo. This gave the original so called “sneaker heads” the feeling that they have something that the newer generation of “sneaker heads” did not. The shoe that they just released featured that iconic Nike Air branding. This hasn’t been seen from the Jordan Brand in over a dozen years, so people went nuts for them.

Rather than releasing them in selected Foot Locker locations, they did an online release. It kept people out of the mall, and it gave criminals no way of knowing who purchased the shoes and whom they could steal them from. All over the country people sat at their computers and smart phones waiting for the release. The shoe sold out in a matter of seconds. For me personally I had 4 computers up and running to try and purchase a pair the second they were posted online, and I was still unsuccessful. To my disappointment I would not be lucky enough to own the $200 shoes, however the shoe released with no problems, and people were happy. We could potentially see this in the future from Foot Locker and other locations for the highly anticipated and popular releases.

* As simple as it sounds, one of the most effective ways to reduce the violence at malls is law enforcement. If police are at the mall in full force and make their presence known on the morning of the release, they can control and reduce the madness. Once the doors to the mall are opened, people storm the mall, breaking doors, trampling people and running right over them as if it was normal. With the police present it gives people a sense of safety. Police officers often escort people to their cars after the purchase due to fear of being mugged and robbed for the shoes. No police force can stop 100% of the crime that goes on around these sneakers, but it definitely makes the release safer and gives people a sense of safety.
* Another way of purchasing your desired sneaker would be through a reseller. Now throughout the sneaker world, there is a lot of disagreement and problems people have with resellers. They will go and purchase many pairs of the sneakers and then sell them back for a profit. Thus making it that much harder for somebody who just wants a pair for themselves. However there are many people making good money off of these sneakers and some even turn it into a complete legitimate business, for instance [www.wegotkicks4sale.com](http://www.wegotkicks4sale.com). People can feel safe buying their sneakers from a trusted business. Instead of going to a crazy mob scene at the mall, having to worry about getting robbed, you can simply wait a couple days for the shoes to be mailed to your house. The buyer however has to be willing to pay a premium price for the sneaker.
* With the endless possibilities of the World Wide Web at people’s fingertips, there are many ways available to purchase sneakers. From Ebay, to [www.flightclubny.com](http://www.flightclubny.com) and the newest website [www.kixify.com](http://www.kixify.com), buyers are able to purchase almost any shoe they could possible want. From the original Air Jordan’s from the 80’s, to the III’s that released last month.
* Shoe collectors have many ways to be able to purchase the sneakers of their liking safely. The Jordan Brand and Foot Locker can only help making the releases safer. The brand has no control of what happens once you purchase their product. Anything can happen to you and there will always be people who want what they can not have or want something that belongs to somebody else. No protection the Jordan Brand or Foot Locker gives to you will be better than the protection you give yourself
* Jordan Brand and frankly, any other designer brand aren’t the problem. The problem is the people in this world who have the image in their mind that they absolutely need to have top-of-the line clothing and foot wear. A designer company clearly never wants their product to be thought of with crime and murders but there is nothing they can do to stop it. The violence and crime is only because of the money there product is showing.

Which leads me to conclude that Air Jordan’s are completely safe. The only thing that is quote on quote “not safe” is the people who want the things that somebody else worked hard for. Certain people in the world give young kids an image of having the best that there is of everything. As long as the celebrities and star figures continue to wear the name brands, there is going to be little kids who envy that and want what they have, and in the end, kids don’t usually have the money to purchase these items on their own.

The world we live in today is so hung up on social status and money that they don’t even realize that every brand of sneakers and every brand of clothing are all the same. They pose the same purpose and they all do their job equally as well. The only difference is the logo that’s attached to it, and the price tag that hangs off of it.